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To cite this article: Walt Kilroy, Sukanya Podder & Allard Duursma (2024) Civilian Protection in Theory and Practice, *Civil Wars*, 26:1, 1-15, DOI: [10.1080/13698249.2024.2332160](https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2024.2332160)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2024.2332160>



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Published online: 07 May 2024.



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## Civilian Protection in Theory and Practice

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### ABSTRACT

This article introduces a Special Issue on the Protection of Civilians (PoC) efforts in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1265 in February 1999, laying the basis for PoC becoming a fundamental part of UN peacekeeping. On the 25th anniversary of this resolution, it's time to reflect on the various advances, achievements and challenges facing the UN's PoC agenda. This introduction to the Special Issue outlines the UN's three-tiered PoC approach: dialogue and engagement, physical protection, and creating a protective environment. Building on this foundation, the Special Issue explores diverse topics, including pre-deployment training, unarmed peacekeeping, host-state consent, military and police roles in protection, the use of force by troops, civilian protection sites in South Sudan, and the unintended effects of peacekeeping missions. Each article contributes insights across the three PoC tiers bringing together cutting edge insights from leading academics and practitioners in the field.

**ARTICLE HISTORY** Received 17 August 2023; Accepted 15 March 2024

Both academics and policymakers are aware that the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts are civilians (Holt and Berkman 2006, Williams 2013). Yet, it has taken a long time before UN peacekeeping operations were equipped with a mandate to protect civilians. During the Cold War era, UN peacekeeping missions were generally not tasked to take direct action to protect civilians. Somewhat of an exception was the Force Commander of the UN peacekeeping operation in the Congo (ONUC), deployed between 1960 and 1964, instructing his military staff to protect unarmed groups facing potentially lethal violence (Oksamytna 2023, pp. 108–109). After the end of the Cold War, the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), deployed in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995, received a somewhat ambiguous mandate to 'deter attacks against the safe areas', which were essentially besieged Bosnian Muslim towns. The ambiguity surrounding 'safe areas' and the role

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of the use of force to defend them played an important role in the tragic events that unfolded in Srebrenica (Oksamytna 2023, pp. 123–125). The UN peacekeeping operation in Rwanda (UNAMIR), deployed between 1993 and 1996, was granted a mandate by the UN Security Council to protect displaced persons, refugees, and civilians at risk within Rwanda, but only when most blue helmets who were part of this mission had withdrawn amidst the unfolding of a genocide (UN Security Council Resolution 918).

It was, however, only in 1999, when the United Nations (UN) Security Council for the first time expressed its willingness to consider how peacekeeping mandates might better address the negative impact of armed conflict on civilians through Resolution 1265. This landmark resolution paved the way for Resolution 1270, which provided the UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) with the first ever mandate for the Protection of Civilians (PoC) in the history of peacekeeping. Now, a quarter of a century later, virtually every major UN peacekeeping mission has a civilian protection mandate (Hultman 2013, Bellamy and Hunt 2015, United Nations 2020). Illustrative of the importance of civilian protection for the UN is that former Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon described it as the ‘defining purpose of the UN in the twenty-first century’ (United Nations News 2012).

These developments were taking place as the international system was still coming to terms with the implications of the failure to respond to the genocides in Rwanda in 1994 and Srebrenica in 1995. The limits of state sovereignty in the context of mass atrocities were being debated in parallel discussions which led to the related but distinct idea of Responsibility to Protect being adopted by the UN in 2005. The question whether or when the UN might use force – and the consequences taking that step or not – could no longer be ignored. The initial protection mandates for peacekeeping missions were worded very tentatively, with multiple caveats, but have gradually become more robust. However, they always recognise the primary responsibility of the host state to ensure the safety of its own civilians. The ways in which the international community might respond also involves many possible approaches – from dialogue and presence to the use of force in extremely limited circumstances – and some of these approaches cannot be pursued at the same time. Many different actors are also involved, from multidimensional missions with both civilians and uniformed personnel, to local leaders and informal processes which are fully embedded in their communities. Each of these has their own interests, culture, legal constraints, and capacities. The international actors’ policies on protection have been informed by practice on the ground and field-led innovations, sometimes in times of crisis.

The literature on this subject has rapidly expanded since the turn to civilian protection in peacekeeping missions that started in 1999. Yet, much remains unknown about what type of protection efforts work and

why. This Special Issue therefore aims to contribute to our understanding of civilian protection. This collection of articles developed from a three-day NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS)-sponsored, advanced research workshop entitled 'Armed Groups, Civilian Protection and United Nations Peacekeeping', held at the Institute for International Conflict Resolution and Reconstruction (IICRR) at Dublin City University (DCU) in November 2018. This workshop aimed to take stock of the major themes surrounding civilian protection in the context of peacekeeping missions ahead of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Resolution 1265. The articles in this Special Issue reflect on how protection of civilian mandates is implemented within UN peacekeeping operations and the key issues that it brings to the fore with respect to host-state consent, the use of force by peacekeepers, protection by police personnel, the training of peacekeepers, and the protection of displaced civilians. Charles Hunt and Adam Day look at the unintended consequences of protection mandates, and how they can negatively affect other tasks which missions are supposed to implement, using the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan as case studies. Sukanya Podder and Kausnik Roy explore the use of force in peacekeeping based on Indian contingents' experiences, developing a preliminary theory of troop reticence. Failure to follow international command is discussed, and uncertainty over rules of engagement when attacks are backed by the host state. The issue of host state consent is taken up by Allard Duursma, Sara Lindberg Bromley, and Aditi Gorur. They argue that this consent can significantly affect implementation of the PoC mandate, but in different ways depending on the specific protection task. Charles Hunt looks at the role of UN police contingents in protection, based on four case studies. This notes the non-military contribution which police can make, since they are uniformed and yet civilian. Walt Kilroy and Klem Ryan consider the protection of civilians 'sites' or camps which grew up spontaneously at UN bases in South Sudan, when more than 200,000 people fled there seeking protection. These sites were not planned or initiated by the UN, but became a significant part of the response for a time. Stian Kjeksrud investigates the circumstances in which the use of force by peacekeepers can assist protection, using a new dataset from 10 missions over a period of almost two decades. He identifies some of the conditions associated with successful outcomes. David Curran writes about pre-deployment training, and in particular the integration of contact skills for military personnel. While Rachel Julian looks at the role of unarmed civilian peacekeeping in advancing protection. Finally, Alex Bellamy offers some conclusions for this Special Issue.

This introduction proceeds as follows. We first briefly reflect on how the protection of civilians (PoC) has been implemented by the UN, discussing

a categorisation of PoC-related activities used by the UN. Next, we apply this categorisation to discuss how the articles in this collection contribute to our understanding on the protection of civilians.

## **The Protection of Civilians in the UN's Practice: A Three-Tiered Approach**

The UN defines PoC as a wide set of 'integrated and coordinated activities by all civilian and uniformed mission components to prevent, deter or respond to threats of physical violence against civilians, within the mission's capabilities and areas of deployment, through the use of all necessary means, up to and including deadly force' (United Nations 2020, p. 3). The UN uses a three-tiered approach to implement its PoC mandate. It categorises mission approaches and instruments for PoC under three rubrics: protection through dialogue and engagement (Tier I), provision of physical protection (Tier II), and establishing a protective environment (Tier III). This operational concept to PoC-action applies an understanding of the tiers as parallel aims, grouping a number of functions and activities to each. We discuss each of these three tiers in this section.

### ***Tier I: Dialogue and Engagement***

While often associated with the use of military or police operations to ensure physical protection, PoC also comprises the use of dialogue and engagement. This first tier of PoC involves, among others, dialogue with perpetrators or potential perpetrators of violence against civilians, mediation between conflict parties, and engaging in local conflict resolution and social cohesion activities (United Nations 2020, p. 12). The Tier 1 activities to protect civilians are closely related to a push towards 'the primacy of politics' in peacekeeping operations, a mantra popularised by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report published in 2015. The HIPPO report highlights the importance of peacekeepers contributing towards conflict resolution:

Lasting peace is not achieved nor sustained by military and technical engagements, but through political solutions. The primacy of politics should be the hallmark of the approach of the United Nations to the resolution of conflict, during mediation, the monitoring of ceasefires, assistance to the implementation of peace accords, the management of violent conflicts and longer-term efforts at sustaining peace. (United Nations 2015, p. 10)

The 2018 Action for Peacekeeping Declaration (A4P) also underlines the need to pursue political objectives in UN peace operations, further committing UN

peace operations to 'stronger engagement to advance political solutions to conflict and to pursue complementary political objectives and integrated strategies' (United Nations 2018: article 4).

A recent report, published by the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research and the Stimson Center, on the political practice of peacekeeping highlights how the effective protection of civilians is conditional on political dialogue and engagement. Based on several case-studies, the authors of this report conclude that 'conceiving of the protection of civilians as a separate objective, without connecting the goals of protection of civilians to a broader political solution, can lead to missed opportunities and poor strategies' (Day *et al.* 2020, p. 16). Indeed, without a negotiated solution to conflicts, widespread killing of civilians often continues. For instance, several mediators involved in peace talks on security arrangements in Darfur between 2004 and 2006 note how the conclusion of a non-viable agreement without the commitment of the conflict parties resulted in the continuation of the conflict and violence against civilians (De Waal 2007, Brickhill 2007, Nathan 2007).

Supporting dialogue in national-level conflicts in which the authority of the government is challenged by rebel groups is not the only Tier I activity of the UN. While the UN has been criticised for not responding to local conflicts (e.g., Autesserre 2010), several reports highlight how UN peacekeeping staff in recent years have begun to support local conflict management efforts in sub-national level conflicts fought between communal groups (Brockmeier and Rotmann 2016, O'Bryan *et al.* 2017). Much of these efforts are aimed at maintaining social cohesion and preventing civilians being killed in these local conflicts (Smidt 2019, Duursma 2020b).

Finally, rather than traditional, impartial mediation, the pursuit of dialogue for the protection of civilians also entails engaging with 'radical' non-state armed groups in contemporary peacekeeping missions. This engagement involves sensitising these groups about avoiding harm to civilians, such as advocacy for human rights and protection (Mamiya 2018). For example, the child protection unit of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo entered into dialogue with more than 20 armed groups in 2017, securing the release of more than 600 child recruits (Mamiya 2018, p. 7).

## ***Tier II: Provision of Physical Protection***

Tier II activities are aimed at physically protecting civilians. This includes a protective presence, inter-positioning, the threat, or use of force, and facilitating safe passage or refuge (Hultman *et al.* 2019). Tier II activities are often conducted by uniformed components and involve the show or use of force to prevent, deter, pre-empt, and respond to threats to civilians (United Nations 2020, p. 12). The use of offensive military force by peacekeepers to

fulfil the mandate to protect civilians is commonly referred to as robust peacekeeping. While the protection of civilians is a key part of the mandates of most peacekeeping operations, this was not the case in the early 2000s. For instance, in January 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan advised against making PoC a core task of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Paddon Rhoads 2016, p. 129). In spite of Annan's reluctance, the protection of civilians became an important part of the job of peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations between 2000 and 2008, describes the decision to send UN peacekeepers tasked with protecting civilians to Ituri in early April 2003 as his 'most important decision' during his tenure as head of peacekeeping (Guéhenno 2015, p. 128).

The turn towards civilian protection in peacekeeping missions has led to a reconceptualisation of impartiality as much more assertive than previously (Paddon Rhoads 2016, Duursma *et al.* 2023). As the Former Eastern Division Commander of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Patrick Cammaert, puts it: 'The UN is impartial and thus is obliged to act when directly confronted with any force attacking/threatening civilians – even if the perpetrators represent the government' (Cammaert quoted in Paddon Rhoads 2016, pp. 130–131).

Despite statements like this, the UN still struggles to fully implement its PoC mandate. Peacekeepers remain especially reluctant to use force against government forces in order to protect civilians. According to Hilde Johnson, the former UN Special-Representative in South Sudan, a major problem in this regard is a lack of guidance from New York when host governments prove to be the main perpetrator (Johnson 2016, 2019). Variation in the execution of peacekeeping mandates by the troops, due to their variable risk appetite, and responsiveness to armed threats, has led to a diversity of responses. This variability in troop responsiveness has elicited on the one hand criticism from western donors and governments for non-western troops that field troops on the ground. As a result, stronger performance or accountability measures have been introduced at the headquarters and in the field (Podder and Manzillo 2021, p. 703), though recent scholarship also suggests that while the UN Secretariat is making efforts to ensure performance accountability, these efforts are frustrated by political concerns (Lundgren *et al.* 2022). Furthermore, a shift from armed to unarmed civilian protection strategies, which are focused on enhancing civilian self-protection capacity has gained traction within the UN peacekeeping context (Jose and Medie 2015).

### ***Tier III: Establishment of a Protective Environment***

Tier III activities are aimed at contributing towards a protective environment for civilians. UN peacekeepers deployed in so-called multidimensional

missions engage in a wide set of activities to not only address the effects of armed conflict but also simultaneously address a wide set of problems related to the root causes of conflict. Indeed, Tier III activities are typically programmatic in nature and financed by resources for peacebuilding objectives (United Nations 2020, p. 12). They include for example security sector reform (SSR) of the state security forces, and the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) of non-state armed actors. Links between PoC and SSR feature across Tiers 1 and 2 of civilian protection work as well. For example, the UN mission may support dialogue and mediation efforts that influence the future of the state security forces (Tier 1), or the mission could engage in military cooperation with the state security forces against various non-state armed actors (Tier 2) (Ebo and Haenggi 2020, p. 197).

Apart from the links between the various protection tiers, and the broader efforts at SSR, Tier III activities aimed at creating a protective environment are often undertaken alongside or in coordination with programmes run by the UN country team on rule of law, human rights, and protection cluster activities or in tandem with the Humanitarian Country Team (Johnson 2019, pp. - 133–152). This tendency to become deeply involved in creating the institutions and governance frameworks of weak and conflict affected states can in fact increase their dependency on external actors. It can undermine the legitimacy of the state and its capacity to protect its own civilians, a point that has been underlined by various scholars of the liberal peace project (Chandler 2010, Zanotti 2010, Mac Ginty 2010, Podder 2013, Richmond 2014). Recent studies find that external support for institution building funnelled through various UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities have inadvertently contributed to the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies on the part of host states, putting civilians at greater risk of state repression of civil liberties (von Billerbeck and Tansey 2019). This in turn generates a paradox, as under international law the primary responsibility for protecting civilians always rests with the host state (UN 2020, p. 68), and Tier III activities therefore should in theory support the host-state's capacity to protect civilians, strengthen the democratisation process, and thereby strengthen its ability to uphold and enforce the rule of law (UN 2020, p. 12).

Having outlined the three tiers through which the protection of civilians' policy is implemented, the next section discusses how each of the articles in this Special Issue fall within this categorisation and how these articles contribute to our understanding of PoC-related activities.

## **The Protection of Civilians in Theory: How This Special Issue Contributes to our Understanding of PoC**

A large literature has focused on how mediation influences the prospects for conflict resolution (e.g., Svensson 2007, Duursma 2020a) or the intensity of



armed conflict measured in the number of battle-deaths (Beardsley *et al.* 2018), but how mediation in civil wars (i.e., a Tier I activity) influences violence against civilians remains a gap in research. Moreover, it is only recently that research is emerging on how peacekeeping can support local conflict management in communal conflicts (Smidt 2019, Krause 2019, Duursma 2020b). In other words, the impact of Tier I activities on the protection of civilians is under-researched.

Some of the articles in this Special Issue contribute to this gap in research. David Curran examines the role of pre-deployment training for military peacekeepers. From a Tier I perspective, it is important that peacekeepers have contact skills. Indeed, according to Curran, communication, cultural awareness, negotiation and mediation, enhance the ability for individuals to communicate with local populations and non-military actors, and engage in non-violent forms of conflict de-escalation. The Secretariat and staff of the Department of Peace Operations at the Headquarters in New York have rolled out numerous guides and training programmes to better prepare peacekeepers for the task of protecting civilians. Curran analyses where and how UN training programmes encourage peacekeepers to draw from their own experiences, encouraging them to build and adapt their own approach to conflict and its resolution. It follows from Curran's article that effective training enhances the ability of peacekeepers to resolve conflicts, meaning they will be more effective in protecting civilians.

Rachel Julian looks at unarmed civilian peacekeeping (UCP), which is a form of protection and peacekeeping that uses non-violence to protect civilians from direct and immediate violence in armed conflict, creating safer spaces for civilians to build peace and protect human rights. Examples of organisations that engage in UCP are the Nonviolent Peaceforce and the Peace Brigades International. Unarmed civilian peacekeepers engage in a range of Tier I PoC activities, such as relationship building, engaging local communities, accompaniment, and Civilian Ceasefire Monitoring. Julian shows how these activities have all been used to save lives, prevent displacement and reduce violence. This contribution to the Special Issue therefore not only provides new insights into how civilians are protected without the threat or use of weapons, it is also relevant for how civilian staff in peacekeeping operations conduct Tier I activities.

Allard Duursma, Sara Lindberg Bromley, and Aditi Gorur also contribute to our knowledge on Tier I activities. The authors examine, among others, how host-state consent influences the ability of UN peacekeeping staff to engage in dialogue to protect civilians. They find that while the UN's role in mediation in civil wars is compromised when the host-state consent is weak, peacekeeping staff can effectively support local peace processes in communal conflicts even when host-state consent is weak.

Moving on to Tier II activities, several of the articles in this Special Issue contribute to our understanding of how peacekeepers can provide physical protection. Stian Kjeksrud leverages a new dataset capturing 200 military protection operations across Africa from 1999 to 2017 to explore the causal conditions explaining UN troops' ability to protect civilians. This analysis fills a clear gap in the research. Several studies have shown that the deployment of peacekeepers reduces violence against civilians (Fjelde *et al.* 2019, Peitz and Reisch 2019). Moreover, numerous studies have described the UN's 'robust' turn in peacekeeping (e.g., Karlsrud 2015), but how effective UN military action is to protect civilians remains by and large unknown. We know little about the conditions leading to successful outcomes when military peacekeepers use force to protect. Kjeksrud finds that in order to be effective in protecting civilians, peacekeepers must match the type of violence applied by the perpetrator. This means that if a perpetrator aims to 'destroy' an ethnic group, the peacekeepers will be most effective in saving lives through destroying the perpetrator's ability to conduct mass killings.

Taking a step back, Sukanya Podder and Kaushik Roy are concerned with the question *when* peacekeepers use force to protect civilians or not. A particular prominent question in this regard is what explains whether different troop contributing countries are more or less inclined to engage in robust action to protect civilians when the mandate and the situation on the ground requires them to do so. Rooting their analysis in the differences in military culture between western expeditionary armies and non-western post-colonial militaries, Podder and Roy develop a preliminary theory of troop reticence, applying it to the longitudinal use of force by peacekeepers from India. They find that there is significant learning around civilian protection on the part of Indian troops from internal counterinsurgency operations. Yet, Indian peacekeepers at times also refrain from using force to protect civilians due to problems with insubordination to international command, gaps in intelligence analysis, and ambiguity over the rules of engagement amidst host-state-directed armed attacks on civilians.

Instead of looking at operations in which peacekeepers use force, Walt Kilroy and Klem Ryan examine how the static presence of peacekeepers deters potential perpetrators from attacking civilians. They zoom in on an innovative development in the practice of peacekeeping, discussing the role of Protection of Civilians sites in South Sudan. When war broke out in South Sudan in December 2013, the UN opened the gates of many of its bases in order to protect civilians. This has resulted in a situation in which UN peacekeepers in South Sudan provide security to over 200,000 civilians. Kilroy and Ryan highlight that while there is a long history of people spontaneously seeking refuge at UN sites, what happened in South Sudan in 2013 was on a different scale. According to the authors, this required an immediate

response, and ultimately led to the development of policies and practices with wider implications for peacekeeping.

Rather than focusing on military personnel, Charlie Hunt focuses on how the police part of peace operations protects civilians. Hunt observes how in parallel to the turn to PoC from 1999 onwards, the number of police personnel deployed in UN peace operations has increased dramatically. Moreover, with the functions of police in peace operations expanded, expectations of what they should achieve increased too. UN Police personnel have engaged in a range of innovative practices. For instance, UN police were effective in interposing between political protesters and the Police Nationale Congolaise (PNC) in Kinshasa during general elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018. Similarly, UN police have played a crucial role in maintaining a minimal level of order in the PoC sites in South Sudan.

While a great deal has been written on how military and police personnel in peacekeeping operations provide physical protection.

Contributing to filling this gap in research, Adam Day and Charlie Hunt in an article which is part of this Special Issue but which was published earlier and separately from it (2022) discuss how an unintended consequence of PoC-related activities by peacekeepers is that attacks on armed groups can lead to civilian deaths. Peacekeepers have supported operations by government forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which caused excessive civilian harm. Moreover, following some offensive operations by UN peacekeepers against armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, these groups conducted reprisal attacks on civilians.

Moving on to Tier III activities, a few of the articles in this Special Issue contribute to our understanding of how peacekeepers can support the establishment of a protective environment. Focusing on the role of UN police personnel, Hunt makes the case that UN police play a crucial role in establishing a protective environment and thus in the process of the eventual draw-down and exit of a peacekeeping operation. More specifically, Hunt identifies two pathways through which UN Police help to work towards a protective environment. First, since national police rarely have the capacity and capabilities to protect civilians from a range of threats in peacekeeping contexts, UN Police can support the host-state policing actors to become more capable of delivering on their obligations to safeguard populations. Second, since host-state police in peacekeeping contexts are typically politicised, militarised, corrupt, and abusive towards their own populations, UN Police can help to reform, restructure, and rebuild police who have been part of the problems that led to deployment of the peace operation in the first place. Through their efforts to reform and rebuild national law enforcement actors, UN Police thus help to eradicate or transform the root causes of threats to civilians. These efforts help to lay the foundations for a sustainable protective environment.

A major challenge identified by Hunt, however, is that efforts by UN Police are often constrained by a dependency on predatory host-states.

Focusing on peacekeeping more broadly Duursma, Gorur, and Lindberg come to a similar conclusion about the importance of host-state consent. In their contribution to this Special Issue, they examine, among others, how the level of host-state consent influences the ability of peacekeepers to support the establishment of a protective environment. The rationale for this focus is that respect for the sovereignty of the host-state has traditionally been a cornerstone of UN missions, but peacekeepers are increasingly confronted with government forces that also target civilians. This has led to constrained relationships between the UN and the host government in countries like Sudan, South Sudan, and the DRC (Sebastián and Gorur 2018, Duursma 2021). Duursma, Gorur, and Lindberg find that weak host-state consent in South Sudan undermined the ability of UN peacekeepers to support the establishment of a protective environment. The UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan lost its capacity-building mandate because South Sudanese government forces were committing human rights abuses against civilians. By contrast, with the benefit of relatively strong political will on the part of the government of the Central African Republic, UN peacekeepers in the country have supported institutional reform of the police and the army, and the deployment of state officials to areas otherwise lacking a state presence.

Julian's contribution on unarmed civilian peacekeeping (UCP) also somewhat falls within the Tier III category. UCP are deployed before, during, and after violent conflict in order to prevent or reduce violence. This can be done directly through engaging with potential perpetrators or indirectly through strengthening or building resilient local peace infrastructures. In the sense that UCP helps to build resilient local communities, it can be seen as a Tier III effort as well. Indeed, recent research suggest that local social organisation and cohesion enable the use of non-violent strategies aimed at preventing violence against civilians (Kaplan 2017).

Finally, Day and Hunt (2022) examine, among others, the tensions between different PoC-related activities. They observe that 'robust' actions to provide physical protection to civilians can distract attention and scarce resources from other, often interdependent, priorities, some of which are aimed at establishing a protective environment. This unintended consequence of the turn to PoC has created a dilemma for the UN because in today's 'endless missions' in which civilians are likely to remain imperilled for decades to come, the UN mission typically struggles to create a defensible exit from the host country.

## Conclusion

The diversity of the thematic issues covered in this Special Issue reflect the many research areas within the field of protection of civilians. The

contributions have looked at what makes peacekeepers effective in protecting civilians but have also identified several obstacles to effectively protecting civilians from violent attacks. Peacekeepers sometimes lack the capacity or situational awareness to respond threats to civilians. Peacekeepers might also not adequately respond because of the differences in military culture, and organisational learning between the western and non-western militaries, as shown by Sukanya Podder and Kaushik Roy in this Special Issue. Another factor that often makes responding to threats to civilians difficult is the sovereignty of the state in which civilians need to be protected. A lack of host-state consent undermines the ability of peacekeepers to implement their PoC mandate.

We started this introduction with a quote by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon who described the protection of civilians as the 'defining purpose of the UN in the twenty-first century' (United Nations News 2012). While we have identified several challenges that make implementing the UN's PoC policy difficult, there seems to be a consensus that PoC is only going to increase in importance for the UN. In his memoir, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan predicts that 'A United Nations that serves not only states but also peoples – and becomes the forum where governments are held accountable for their behaviour toward their own citizens – will earn its place in the twenty-first century' (Annan and Mousavizadeh 2012, p. 372). Similarly, Roméo Dallaire, the former Force Commander of the UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda when the genocide started, reflects in the last pages of his memoir on the Rwandan Genocide: 'As soldiers we have been used to moving mountains to protect our own sovereignty or risks to our way of life. In the future we must be prepared to move beyond self-interest to spend our resources and spill our blood for humanity' (Dallaire 2008, p. 522).

Although PoC is not without challenges, the UN has developed an impressive PoC policy since the UN Security Council issued Resolution 1270, which provided UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone with the first ever civilian protection mandate in the history of peacekeeping. It is our hope that the articles in this Special Issue will allow scholars and practitioners to take stock and reflect on the progress and remaining challenges of civilian protection efforts.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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